

1914—Four Years of Hun Frightfulness—1918

Herod the Second



With apologies to Herod the First

—From Esquella, Barcelona.

By Ralph Block

IT TOOK the Germans something like forty years to build up their great nineteenth century tradition of kultur. But four swift years have undone what it took forty years to build.



After four years the "German thing" is a n a t h e m a through all the world. Its empire is edged in blood on the map of Europe, and over it lurks the smoke of thousands of towns, the floating dust of funeral pyres. The world was to be made German, not merely its lands, but all men. And where humanity, held by memories and faiths the German could not understand or appreciate, resisted, the answer was death—death in all the vile forms that lust and flaming animal wrath could invent. Such is the picture which rises before one as he turns over the records which stand now as a formal indictment.

It is not one Belgian child with mutilated arms that the world must face, but hundreds of thousands of human beings mutilated, raped, bayoneted, burned, robbed of wealth, goods and honor and then tossed to death like carrion. It would take many volumes to give the full report of the available mass of evidence. This summary, prepared from materials covering the last four years, can at best but point the way.

Belgium is an overpowering episode in the indictment against the German. But in the end it remains only an episode. The ruin of Belgium—literally the rape of Belgium, because thousands of women were ravished and assaulted—was the beginning in a long programme. The horrors of Aerschot are matched by the horrors of Nish and Erzerum. For one body in a Belgian canal there have been thousands in the Euphrates. In the East the Turk and the Bulgar, led by German officers, stirred to ambition by German accomplishment, have matched the Belgian programme in every particular. Europe and Asia, wherever the poisoned German breath has touched, have become a waste, swept clean of everything but blood.

In the volumes to be compiled some day will be the report of the Belgian royal commission. The story of Aerschot will be told, Aerschot where, in the middle of August, 1914, the German army pillaged and fired for three days, taking the men of the village

out and shooting them four at a time. There is the story of Louvain, where the banks were robbed, the women of all ages raped and bayoneted, the map soaked in petroleum and burned alive. It was the road between Louvain and Tirlemont that the Belgian commission reported as lined with civilian corpses.

The notebooks of captured German soldiers will not be forgotten in the indictment. There is in instance the notebook of the private of the 22d Reserve Infantry who wrote from Creil on September 3: "The iron bridge was blown up. For this we set the streets on fire and shot the civilians." Another whose record was made near Bouvignes, north of Dinant, reports that the inhabitants were "shot at such close range that they were almost decapitated . . . the women and children locked into a convent from which shots were fired. And for this reason the convent is about to be set fire to."

General von Bülow himself made no secret of his intentions toward the Belgian people. On August 22, 1914, he proclaimed at Liège, with respect to the charge that the people of Ardennes had been shooting at his troops: "It was with my consent that the general in chief set fire to the whole locality and that about one hundred persons were shot."



The Bryce report is probably the most conclusive of all the evidence, prepared after long deliberation, drawn up by men accustomed to give the proper judicial review to facts, based on 1,200 Belgian depositions, diaries taken from the German dead and German proclamations. In the report here and there are found illuminating instances of the German method.

"At Mélan, a hamlet west of Hervé, forty men were shot. In one household alone the father and mother (names given) were shot, the daughter died after being repeatedly outraged."

"The systematic execution of civilians" is reported.

"In Soumagne and Micheroux very many civilians were summarily shot in a field belonging to a man named E., fifty-six or fifty-seven were put to death. A German officer said: 'You have shot at us.' One of the villagers asked to be allowed to speak, and said: 'If you think these people fired, kill me, but let them go.' The answer was three volleys. The survivors were bayoneted. Their corpses were seen in the field that night by another witness. One at least had been mutilated. These were not the only victims in Soumagne. The eyewitness of the massacre saw, on his way home, twenty bodies, one that of a

young girl of thirteen. Another witness saw nineteen corpses in a meadow."

Three hundred houses were burned at Hervé. Mounted men shot into the doors and windows to prevent escape. This was repeated at Liège, where fifteen women were raped in daylight on tables in the Place de l'Université.

This is from a German soldier's diary for August 15, 1914, written at the town of Wandre: "The inhabitants without exception were shot. This shooting was heartbreaking, as they all knelt down and prayed, but that was no ground for mercy."

At Ardennes on the Meuse, near Namur, the Germans machine-gunned the town for two hours. Four hundred civilians were killed here. At Dinant there were 120 bodies. The rest of the inhabitants were taken to Germany. At Hofstade there were "many corpses"; and then "two young women were lying in the backyard of the house. One had her breasts cut off, the other had been stabbed . . . a young man had been hacked with the bayonet until his entrails protruded. He also had his hands joined in an attitude of prayer." From this district Belgians were transported to Germany in cattle trucks. The cars were crowded, without food for days, and full of filth. Some of the women went mad on the way.

The Bryce committee, concluding its report, referred to the individual atrocities of other wars, keeping in mind that war is always a thing of brutality, and then wrote "the killing was done as part of a deliberate plan. It began at a certain fixed date and stopped at another fixed date."

The report was valuable for more than its effect upon the opinion of the world. It disclosed an actual, well worked out and comprehensively planned effort on the part of Germany to terrorize the world.

Every appearance of German frightfulness cannot escape this implication of an intentional madness. It is the same on the seas as on land. It gives a similar meaning to the Lusitania sinking, to the Armenian massacres, the spoliation of Lithuania and Poland, the devastation of conquered French territory, the murder of Edith Cavell, the firing on Red Cross camps and the shelling of hospital ships, the Zeppelin raids on open cities in England, the bombardment of Paris, the air raids on Italian cities, filled with the art treasures of another time; the destruction of the Rheims Cathedral, the attempted murder of the Serbian people by Austria. The

The "War Brides" of Lille



Under the heel

—From a photograph by Steinlen, in Cartoons Magazine

accumulation of facts takes it further and further from the realm of the accidental.



At Louvain the German deliberately destroyed the ancient Gothic Church of St. Pierre, and gave the splendid university and its library to the torch. He entered Rheims September 4 of that first year and bombarded it that day. A week later he evacuated the ancient city and bombarded it steadily for five days, later turning his guns malevolently on the cathedral until only a shell remained. He tried to lie out of his crime. He had claimed so long to be the protector of art, the patron of the beautiful, that the rôle of destroyer did not sit gracefully. Lieutenant Wengler, of the Germany Heavy Artillery, made a public announcement. It was he who had bombarded Rheims, but he had fired two poor shots, merely to dislodge a French observer. That was the total account. It is interesting to recall the letter that Richard Harding Davis wrote to "The New York Times" about Lieutenant Wengler's shots, in which he pointed out how well the lieutenant lied:

"Up to the hour of 3 howitzer shells had passed through the southern wall of the cathedral, killing two of the German wounded inside, had wrecked the Grand Hotel opposite the cathedral, knocked down four houses immediately facing it, and in a dozen places had torn up immense holes in the cathedral square. Twenty-four hours after Lieutenant Wengler claims he ceased firing shells set fire to the roof and utterly wrecked the chapel of the cathedral and the archbishop's palace, which is joined to the cathedral by a yard no wider than Fifth Avenue; and in the direction of the German guns the two shells fired by Lieutenant Wengler had already wrecked that part of the city surrounding the cathedral for a quarter of a mile."

There is still the fringe of events that radiate from Belgium, like spear points of fire from a burning sun. There is the sinking of Belgian relief ships that Germany must account for when sentence is pronounced, beginning with the Storstad, plainly marked and carrying 10,000 tons of corn to relieve the starving nation. The Storstad was sunk and shelled, so were the Tunisie and the Haeken. Submarines have been carrying out the design further at intervals ever since.

And if a conspiracy to complete, by the destruction of aid, the assault on a people were not enough, Germany furthered it by a more consistent plan of

robbery, the records reveal. Families were destroyed, and 100,000 individuals were taken from their homes to Germany. Cardinal Mercier protested to Governor General von Bissing, who replied with what have since been called scarcely veiled sophistries. Holland protested, so did the United States and the Pope—to little end.

But if Belgium had suffered, what of France? During the German retreat of March, 1917, cities and towns were pillaged and destroyed, the fruit trees were hacked down, or ringed, to die later. Wells and streams were poisoned. Securities were even taken from the banks, in violation of The Hague articles, and the thousand square miles that were evacuated were left empty and barren of all that had given them life and beauty. Houses were blown up, furniture smashed with picks, farm carts hacked to pieces and implements burned. And as in Belgium, many of the civilian population were sent back to Germany to labor there. Proclamations were posted in the Aisne region calling men, women and children to work in the fields from 4 a. m. to 8 p. m., including Sunday, with penalties, most often of the whip, sometimes the bullet, for idlers.

Then there was Edith Cavell, murdered because she helped Belgian soldiers across the frontier. It has been called "an uneasy conscience" that made the Germans deny to Hugh Gibson, secretary of the American Legation, that sentence had been pronounced, when the moment for the shooting had already been set. There were early air raids on London and Paris, planned for purposes of terrorization. The Lusitania, with its thousand dead; the thousand visitations of the submarine, the shelling of open lifeboats tossed on the ocean, the mined shipping track in the North Sea to kill Dutch and Danish sailors by the hundreds when the submarine had not yet found its pace. There were the poison gases around Ypres—the first poison gas in the war—sending the British and the French back, reeling, gasping, choking and strangling.



This is a small part of the German tale in the west. The east still remains, with a story that is no less horrible, "no less comprehensively an arraignment of the German scheme to make the world bow or be slain." A French official report, thirty pages of it, written in De-

Count Zeppelin



German Air Pilot—"No hospitals, no cathedrals here—pass on!"

—From Pile Mele, Paris.

cember of 1914, said: "Pillage, rape, arson and murder are the common practices of our enemies. Crimes against women and young girls have been of appalling frequency."

Shift the scene to Armenia, to Serbia, to Lithuania and to Poland.

In Armenia it seems to have been the German example in Belgium that encouraged Turkey to set out to exterminate the Armenian nation. In five months from 500,000 to 800,000 Armenians died, snuffed out by a procedure quite German in its uniformity. The men from fifteen to seventy were taken out and shot. Others were taken out across great barren stretches of land and abandoned to starvation. Women were ravished, sold to harems, children sold to brothels. Children born by the roadside were left to die, their mothers dragged along until death, too, came to rescue them. The Euphrates in 1915 was covered with the bodies of Armenian women who preferred death in the river to the death and dishonor that a Germanized Turkey brought to them.

The Bryce report on the Turkish atrocities in Armenia was based on 150 documents and all the available authentic evidence obtainable to July, 1916. The report characterized the Armenian case as "the most colossal crime in the history of the world." According to the Bryce report the roads in Erzerum, Billis and Diarbekir were lined with corpses of Armenians hanged in batches. For a month corpses flooded the Euphrates. A German eyewitness wrote thus of the tortures he saw in Harput:

"They have had their eyebrows plucked out, their breasts cut off, their nails torn off, their torturers hew off their feet or else hammer nails into them." And to complete the irony of this, coming from a German, members of the German High School faculty at Aleppo, knowing well enough where the source of these things might be found, protested to the German Foreign Office that Armenia would be "a stain on German honor for centuries to come."

But if the Turks learned the lesson well, the Austrians are shown to have profited likewise. Quantities of explosive bullets were found among the Austrian stores in the Serbian invasion in 1914—whole cases of them, devised to penetrate the skin and then explode. Serbian prisoners who were wounded were killed, the civilian population burned alive, women raped here as elsewhere. An Austrian soldier of the 26th Landsturm wrote that they had received "orders to bayonet men, women and children without distinction." If frightfulness was good for Belgium, surely it was effective against Serbia. The table

of atrocities can be found in a report rendered by R. A. Reiss, a professor at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland. In Serbia he found the dead disembowelled, arms and legs broken, cut or torn, noses and ears cut off, eyes put out, the breasts cut off, and bodies cut in pieces or beheaded.

Turn a little nearer Berlin, and the German himself is met again at the game. There was Poland, with 500,000 girls ravished. General von Beseler, the German Governor of Warsaw, posted a bulletin, offering 150 marks for boys and 100 marks for girls for every child born of a German father. Helen Paderevska, a Polish woman in America, wrote: "German armies occupy the land, and nearly every Polish girl is the property of a German. There is no escape."



Lithuania was Hindenburg's job, before his mastery of the conqueror's task had put him on the Western front. Read the speech of Dr. Tresic Pavicic, a Jugoslav Deputy at Vienna, for the clearest picture of the ruin in Lithuania and Serbia. Everything of value to Germany was stolen and sent back. Girls of fourteen were stripped and publicly violated, then murdered, in front of their parents. When the infuriated men broke loose they were hanged. Pregnant women were beaten and hanged. Trenches evacuated by the German-Austrian troops were found filled with the bodies of dead Lithuanian girls who had been passed on from officers to privates. "Red light" districts were established, with Lithuanians as inmates. Families were forced to send their daughters to soldiers to get money for food.

And the Bulgars in Serbia were consistent pupils of the German scheme. In Bosnia-Herzegovina the Jugo-Slavs were compelled to dig their own graves, lie in them and be shot, the living putting earth over the dead until their turn came. It was for the Bulgars a war of extermination. Near Nish 30,000 were carried off into Asia Minor. The Serbs would not eat fish from the River Nishava because they said it was full of Serbian dead.

But all this is sanctioned in the book of Prussian ethics, the Bible of the Supermen. You open it at random and you read:

"The strong will and must discharge their strength; and in doing so they have the make of other beings in their development is purely incidental." . . .